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HOMEMAKERS' CHAT

Thursday, Dec. 7, 1939

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject; "INSECTICIDES." Information from the Food and Drug Administration,  
U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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We've talked so much about the new Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act, we've almost forgotten that the Food and Drug Administration also has other work to do. Enforcing the Insecticide Act is another of the important jobs of this government agency, because if products used to kill insect pests and plant fungi are below the strength claimed, crops may be seriously threatened. And if such products contain injurious ingredients, valuable crops and livestock may be damaged. Our Washington correspondent writes:

"Perhaps you've heard the story of the farmer who once wrote a testimonial to a manufacturer of an insecticide. After reading the label on the package he wrote, 'Dear Sirs I see your insecticide contains 90 percent inert. That there inert sure is great stuff, it gets the bugs every time please send another package.

"Of course many of the dusting powders and liquid sprays we use must contain a large amount of inactive 'inert' material to carry the small proportion of important insecticide or fungicide that does the work. So, the chemists of the Food and Drug Administration have to make sure that the other ingredients besides the 'inert' are all that is claimed for them.

"Many powders and sprays have proved upon testing to be completely worthless, and the inspectors are constantly on the watch for such preparations. Others may be injurious if used in the manner directed. For example, an impure lead arsenate spray might injure foliage.



"Last year the Food and Drug Administration examined more than 2500 samples of insecticides, fungicides and disinfectants. All such preparations are important to farmers, and to a good many persons who don't live on farms. But I imagine that homemakers are chiefly interested in products used to get rid of household pests- insects like moths, ants, roaches, fleas and bed bugs. The Food and Drug Administration reports testing about 750 household products of this kind, and on the whole gives them a pretty good score- only 35 required prosecution or seizure.

"Some of the tests brought out interesting new points about insect likes and dislikes. For example, except for the Argentine ant, very little is known about which poisoned baits are attractive to ants. The chemists made a great many tests, and found that relatively slight differences in the composition of poisoned baits made them unattractive to these insects. Many species of ants like sugars, but they like the sweetest ones best. They don't care for milk sugar at all because it isn't very sweet, so it's useless for a manufacturer to mix up an ant poison containing only milk sugar as a sweetener. Some of the common varieties of ants definitely prefer greases and pass over sweetened poisons unless some sort of fat is added to them.

"Investigators found that the quality of fly sprays and moth preventives on the market has been decidedly raised in recent years. The so-called moth-proofing preparations are more effective than they used to be. They are usually made so as to leave a substance in the fiber of the article to protect it from moth damage for a long period of time. About 250 moth preparations including contact sprays, fumigants and moth proofers were tested and only 5 were seized.

"Some of the mosquito repellents tested did not contain enough oil of citronella or other repellent oil to do any good. There were also 5 seizures of roach preparations and 16 of general household insecticides.



"Disinfectants, germicides, and bactericides continue to be troublesome sources of violation. One reason is that chlorine preparations deteriorate in the course of time, so often they do not have the strength claimed, even if they had it when packed. Some of the disinfectants were found to be adulterated with mineral oil. Products recommended for sterilizing surgical instruments were serious offenders, because if surgical instruments are used when they are imperfectly sterilized they may cause dangerous infections. Anything that sterilizes will kill all germs, including bacterial spores. No known product is entirely satisfactory for sterilizing delicate instruments in short periods of time. In hospitals special sterilizing apparatus is used. However, more than 300 samples of disinfectants were tested and only 66 were seized or prosecuted.

"All the products subject to the Insecticide Act are continually being improved, very often through research in the various bureaus of the U.S. Department of Agriculture and in the various State experiment stations. More than 500 of the preparations examined this year, or about 21 percent, had never been previously encountered by the inspectors. Each product had to be thoroughly tested, sometimes over a considerable period of time, to make sure that it would do what the label claimed.

"Most of the agricultural insecticides have become well standardized, and on the whole the number of domestic products that violated the law was relatively small compared with the large number tested,- 136 seizures or prosecutions as against 2,500 sampled. Twenty-three import shipments were barred out of 125 offered for entry."

Our Washington reporter ends her letter by pointing out the fact that it takes continual watchfulness on the part of inspectors to insure effective enforcement of the Federal Insecticide Act.

